

WASHINGTON, DC-- Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) today introduced legislation modeled after a successful mentoring program founded in Portland, Oregon called "Friends of the Children." The "Friends of the Children National Demonstration Act" would authorize federal funding for early intervention programs that serve our nation's most at-risk and vulnerable children.

"Tomorrow, the first class of children is set to graduate, not only from the Friends of the Children program, but High Schools across Portland," said Blumenauer. "I applaud the efforts of these students, their mentors and specifically the Friends of the Children program. I am proud to introduce this bill to ensure similarly at-risk children around the nation can find success in this proven and tested program."

The "Friends of the Children National Demonstration Act" bill will authorize funding for Friends of the Children to support local program operations at existing sites, ongoing student evaluations, and research. Friends programs, founded in Portland, Oregon, have been established in eleven other communities across six states. These programs have fostered long-term, supportive, adult relationships through mentoring programs that target at-risk children in early childhood and follow them through graduation. This funding will help to ensure the continued successes of the Friends of the Children programs across the nation.

"Friends of the Children is about giving the most disadvantaged children a fair chance in life and saving society money by reducing the need for much more costly intervention later in life," commented Catherine Milton, President, Friends of the Children. "It has the potential to become one of the most effective prevention and early intervention programs in the country."

Research shows that the single most important factor in a child's life is a long-term relationship with a supportive, caring adult. While the most at-risk children can be accurately identified at age five, very few long-term intervention programs are initiated at this age. Friends of the Children has functioned for the past twelve years as a privately funded program matching "professional mentors" with the most at-risk children starting in early childhood and continuing for a minimum of ten years. There is currently no Federal competitive grant or contract program to fund these programs. Blumenauer's bill will authorize \$7 million annually for programs like the Friends of the Children and to promote the continued success of these programs around the nation.